Don’t Press Big Red Buttons (or Other Artifacts)

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by MC_Hammer666

Summary

All of MXTX’s main characters awaken in random parts of Shanghai in the midst of a danmei convention. It’s obviously Jun Wu’s fault. Shen Yuan is somehow the only sane mind here—or is he?

Anyways.

Chaos ensues.

Chapter 1: Game On

Wei Wuxian woke up in a jerk. Instantly, he knew everything was wrong.

Had he been anyone else, Wei Wuxian might have thought the emptiness in his lower dantian and the heaviness in his limbs meant he'd exhausted his spiritual energy. However, the Yiling Patriarch was more than familiar with the sensation: his golden core was gone.

Groaning, the man struggled to his feet. That was when the second thing hit him: his line of sight was much higher than it should be.

Flabbergasted, Wei Wuxian spun around, but everywhere he looked, he found himself staring down at the ground a good head too high. Had Lan Wangji been around, he could have stared him straight in the eyes.

"Uh?" Wei Wuxian interrogated the empty alley. "Lan Zhan?"

Long black hair flowed in his wake, two crimson strings parting the smooth strands. The overflowing and billowing grey robes he wore did little to conceal the thinness of his body. At the familiar yet foreign voice, too deep and smooth to be his own, Wei Wuxian raised a brow. The Yiling Patriarch was quite unimpressed to find himself in his original body. Whoever it was that pulled this trick had to be a boring, unoriginal individual. Did they not know Wei Wuxian already had some experience waking up in strange places in strange bodies?

Copycat.

Anyways, the most pressing matter was that Lan Wangji was not there to enjoy the sight.

Wei Wuxian clearly remembered going to bed with his husband the night before—or, rather, following, cough, cough, their nightly routine, Lan Wangji had gone to sleep at nine and Wei Wuxian had gone to tinker with some strange talisman he'd found on his last night hunt with the juniors—

Hm.

Wei Wuxian snapped his fingers. So, that was what the glowing red character that wouldn't stop flashing (forebodingly) meant! He really shouldn't have succumbed to the tentation and pressed it.

Wei Wuxian turned around and exited the narrow alley. Would he be able to find his way back to Gusu from here? Without Bichen nor his golden core—

However, the moment Wei Wuxian stepped into the light, he froze. His eyes widened. "I don't think I'm in Gusu anymore," he chuckled.

Now, the Yiling Patriarch was impressed.

A wicked grin slowly stretched his lips. His silver eyes flashed the colour of blood.

Bring it on.

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Xie Lian had had his fair share of strange occurrences in his long life. Things had quietened down somewhat since his husband broke his shackles in yet another self-sacrificial tendency —not that Xie Lian could judge him, of all people—but life still could not be called ‘easy’ from then on.

Surprises tended to occur when one was married to a Ghost King and ruler of a charmingly disordered city of ghosts. Being the Heavenly Emperor did not help fostering a tranquil lifestyle either.

At least not everything was out to get him, now! Xie Lian could walk under a row of windowsills and only be hit by a couple of potted plants!

However, such major improvements might have made him complacent. Had he been more on guard, he might have regarded the glowing red lamp that wouldn’t stop flashing (forebodingly) which he found on his last junk-collecting trip with more apprehension.

With a placid smile, Xie Lian folded his hands in the wide white sleeves of his daoist robes and gazed at the sight the narrow alley he woke up to opened on. Slowly, he brought two fingers to his temple, “San Lang?”

Silence.

Closing his eyes, he sighed toward the hard, unnatural ground he stood on. Sometimes, the God would really like to know whether he wanted to laugh or cry.

On the bright side of things, Xie Lian was certain it wouldn’t be long before Hua Cheng found him. The God simply hoped his husband would not burn down the realms doing so.

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“FUCK!” Shen Qingqiu, or rather, Shen Yuan swore. “Fuck, fuck, fuck! Stupid trash novel, shitty author, fucking SYSTEM!”

He really should have known better than to trust the system and push to glowing red button that wouldn’t stop flashing (forebodingly) it offered him. The one in a life time chance to get rid of the system for good?

“My ass,” Shen Yuan grumbled darkly while stomping out of the narrow alley.

This master should have known the offer sounded far too good to be true! A fucking scam was all this was! Or, worse, another fucked up wife plot that dumb author could not even bring himself to actually complete!

Plot holes! Plot holes everywhere!

Shen Yuan was dead! So, how come he'd woken up in his old body?! Yet, he wore Shen Qingqiu's soft green robes—why?! Xiu Ya was strapped at his waist, brimming with spiritual powers, but Shen Yuan couldn't see shit because he didn't have his stupid glasses! A Peak Lord with glasses, had anyone ever seen something so pathetic? It was about as coherent as cultivators travelling by carriages!

Dumbfuck novel, dumbfuck author!

"Airplane, if I catch you airplane…"

For fucks' sake, even the system was ghosting him! For once it actually followed through with its promise and disappeared, but couldn't it at least hand him the script of this fuckery first?!

No, first he had to find his husband before he tore down Cang Qiong Mountain—

"Are you Bing-ge or Bing-mei?"

"I'm Bing-ge. She's Bing-mei."

"I thought Bing-mei wore white inner robes—"

"No, that's Bing-ge—"

"Oh look! It's your husband! Shen Qingqiu!"

As he stormed down the street, Shen Yuan suddenly froze. With a creak audible to the naked ear, his neck turned stiffly towards the voices. His fair skin turned ghastly pale.

His surroundings finally registered. As a gaggle of schoolgirls dressed as his husband flocked him, the world came to a metaphorical stop around Shen Yuan.

…This master might have to worry about more than just Cang Qiong mountain range.

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Pristine white robes fluttered quietly in the crisp morning air, at odds with the dark and unkempt alley. Stench overpowered the narrow passage, and hundreds of roaring beasts broke the quietude of the immortal's rest.

Lan Wangji opened his eyes.

He was not in Gusu.

Lan Wangji closed his eyes.

"Wei Ying…" he sighed.

Once Lan Wangji rose, he set out to go where the chaos was.

There, he'd find his spouse.

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Hua Cheng glanced down at his chest.

His beating chest.

With his two eyes.

He hummed non-commitally. Raising one hand, the Ghost King, or rather, the mortal summoned a butterfly.

Nothing happened.

Hua Cheng—he refused to go back to that welp's name, hong-er—dropped his hand and brought it to his abdomen.

There was no golden core there. As a mortal, he never cultivated.

Hua Cheng thought of killing himself and turning back into a resentful ghost, but quickly rejected the idea. It wouldn't do if he were to begin again as a powerless ghost fire. How would he find Dianxia, then? His mortal form was useless, but at least it had legs.

Clenching down on the red string of fate tying him to his beloved, Hua Cheng set out of the alley in steady strides. The many people he crossed stared at him with wide bulging eyes and gaping mouths. The youth, maybe fifteen of age, was already taller than most despite his thin and gangly frame. He wore cheap grey rags and the soles of his cloth booths were pierced through from overuse, yet Crimson Rain Sought Flower stood proudly and haughtily. His pace was fast, but still managed to appear leisurely. With hands clasped behind his back that stood straight as a pine and his head held high, the young man in rags looked regal as a king.

However, what had the passerby squeal back in terror was the crimson eye that glared down at them with an intensity that might shatter their soul.

Hong-er would have thrown a tantrum and jumped at anyone who dared flinch at the sight of him. Wu Ming had despised this eye of his enough to rip it out and turn it into a malicious blade. Hua Cheng didn't need to inflict himself this kind of damage anymore to weaponize that cursed eye of his.

Under his bloody gaze, the sea of people parted before him better than if he'd wielded E'ming and cut their legs. Such mob was no better than the useless trash dwelling in Ghost City.

He barely raised a brow at what he saw of this world. Whoever caused this could wait for now. Crimson Rain Sought Flower had his priorities well sorted. As long as Xie Lian existed, in this world or another, Hua Cheng would always find him first and foremost.

"Wait for me, Dianxia," the mortal breathed in a prayer.

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“Shizun? Shizun?” Luo Binghe called with translucent tears beading at the corner of his eyes.

The deafening silence was only pierced by the roaring of countless beasts in the distance. Were those the calls of Plated-Breast Steel Rhinoceros? It had to be a whole squadron of them.

Shizun having defected from his side (again), Luo Binghe’s eyes hardened. The nip of tears quickly dried and a sour smirk twisted his expression.

He’d hunt Shizun down before, that wasn’t much of a challenge. However…

The Heavenly Demon looked down at his hand and the sword in his clutch.

Luo Binghe narrowed his eyes at Xin Mo—somehow intact. The resentment it held was as powerful as ever, and he could already feel its action on his mind, making him believe that Shizun had abandoned him (again), that Shizun—

With a growl, Luo Binghe slashed the empty air. Under Xin Mo’s influence, the atmosphere of the dark and narrow alley shuddered before a gaping portal opened. On the other side, twelve wizened mountain peaks seemed to laugh at him.

Anger bubbled in his dark gaze. If Shizun didn’t care so much, Luo Binghe would have flattened that mountain range until only Qing Jing Peak poked the skies.

The half-demon closed the portal then strapped the cursed sword to his back. Black miasma poured out of his clenched fists. When his heavy strides lead him out of the alley he found himself in, the Heavenly Demon scoffed, but there wasn’t any mirth there.

It was much too complex to be a dreamscape. Whatever dimension this was, at least it wasn’t *his* world. Luo Binghe never wanted to go back there. A world without Shizun…

He clenched his teeth so hard, the half-demon tasted blood.

‘*Shizun, when I find you Shizun… I’ll drag you home, kicking and screaming if I need to.’*

Luo Binghe knew exactly where to go : all he had to do was follow the scent of his own blood.

Chapter 2: The Imposter

Jiang Cheng sat with both elbows on his thighs, chin held up by his clasped hands, as he pretended to listen.

What the fuck was he was doing here.

He'd love to pin the blame on Wei fucking Wuxian, but the crazy fuck in white—Jun Wu or something—had already acknowledged his role as the mastermind here.

Rookie mistake.

The other crazy fuck in black throttled the God as resentment stormed furiously about his hulking figure. "Where is he! Where is Shen Qingqiu! *He's* the scum villain! Bring him back!"

"ENOUGH!" the God exploded in a blinding pulse of spiritual energy. Luo Binghe backtracked a handful of steps. "How many times must I tell you, impertinent child, that this is not about your story, but *his*!"

It was the demon's turn to explode. "WHY IS IT ALWAYS ABOUT HIM?!"

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes. There he went again.

"That crybaby! Why does he get to have a kind Shizun when all I got was rotted scum! You say your spell brings heroes and villains to life, so why am I here if it's all about his goddamn story? Where's *my* villain?!"

Jiang Cheng pressed his tightly knitted fingers closer to his mouth. Was he truly the villain in Wei Wuxian's story? What's the worst he ever did to that fucker, stab him? Destroy his hellhole of a home? Murder the dogs he called family? Lead him to his death? So what?

That traitor deserved it.

He came back anyway, didn't he?

Jiang Cheng always knew he would.

Jun Wu clenched his fists in his back. To the seething demon plunged in resentment, he clicked his tongue. "I don't know."

"What about Xin Mo!"

"Who?"

Luo Binghe roared.

Jiang Cheng stared at nothing.

Crazy fucks.

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In this dreary world lacking in all form of qi, Wei Wuxian spotted the kid from a whole li away like a beacon through the night.

His jade-like skin, free of pain and blemishes, shimmered with unbridled power. This sheltered young master deambulated the strange, very strange street at a snail's pace, quite unlike the busy speed of the mortals pushing him this way and that. Still, the teen kept a benign smile on his lips, and a serene look in his eyes.

From a small distance away, Wei Wuxian snickered as the cultivator wondered before yet another dumpster.

Weird, but overall inoffensive, was Wei Wuxian final and irreversible opinion of this kid.

As such, this Laozhu did not hesitate to approach the boy and grasp his white daoist robes before he plunged head-first in the trash. "Hey, hey, didi! Be careful, or are you trying to find your way back to our world?"

Wei Wuxian smirked down at the kid.

Wide chestnut eyes lifted—longingly—from the dumpster to the demonic cultivator. He smiled. "This one is, in fact, trying to find his way back home."

"By diving in trash?"

"That's how I found myself here."

Wei Wuxian laughed. "Really? I picked up a talisman from a really shady tomb!"

The cultivator eyed the tendrils of resentment circling the Yiling Patriarch with far too little concern. "Daozhang is fearless."

"My husband would call me reckless, but both are fine!"

The boy's amber eyes lit up. "Your husband?"

"Yeah! Lan Zhan, Lan Wangji, Hanguang-Jun! You know him?"

"I fear I don't." The stranger shook his head. Dark locks of silky hair murmured over the white of his robes. "Is the monicker 'Crimson Rain Sought Flower' familiar to you?"

Wei Wuxian grinned. "Nope! Not at all!"

This was getting more interesting with every breath. Speaking of intriguing—

"By the way, didi, do you cultivate the demonic path too? Your insides are stained with resentment!"

Quite unexpectedly, the kid flushed a deep shade of crimson. He stammered incoherently before suddenly swirling around and fleeing across the street with both hands covering his heated cheeks. The countless beasts roaring their way the entire length of the street like threads of dutiful ants screeched to a halt and shouted in consternated blares.

Wei Wuxian cackled as he dodged his way through the beasts of steel. “Hey, didi, where are you going? Wait for me!”

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“Oh my god! Gege!!”

The demonic cultivator just caught up to Xie Lian when the god skittered to a halt and uncovered his eyes. He did a double take.

Across the street, standing tall on the strange walkway Xie Lian just evaded, was a figure in crimson robes and intricate silver jewelries. Endless raven locks bounced down the man’s slender back, and at his waist dangled a wickedly curved scimitar.

Frozen, Xie Lian mouthed quietly, “San Lang?”

“What did you say?” Wei Wuxian asked.

“San Lang,” Xie Lian called, louder this time. His feet were already taking him back through the blaring beasts—towards his husband.

Hua Cheng dressed so excessively, it was impossible to mistake this person for anyone but his San Lang!

“Gege!” San Lang encouraged him.

“SAN LANG!” Xie Lian shouted back. A wide grin illuminated the God’s entire being. The last few steps, he sprinted, his arms spread wide. “San Lang, you’re here!”

Just as Xie Lian was about to jump in his husband’s arms, Hua Cheng *squealed*.

Xie Lian froze like a deer caught by the light.

“Gege, what’s wrong gege?” Hua Cheng sauntered—*sauntered*—to Xie Lian. He twirled around in a ring of cheap metal. “Am I not pretty enough for you, gege?” the fake pouted.

Xie Lian retreated. Unfortunately, the imposter followed after him.

“Gege, look at me, gege, pleaaaase—“

Xie Lian reeled. Pale as a sheet, he struggled to wrap his head around the fact someone was bold enough to impersonate Hua Cheng of all people—and what a miserable imitation! Who were they, a low-level wrath?! Did they ever meet Crimson Rain Sought Flower in person?! His husband did not *squeal*!

Gaping like a dried fish, Xie Lian barely registered the man pushing him behind his back.

Resentment flooded out of the demonic cultivator in dark, menacing waves.

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Moments later, Xie Lian sat over the hardened hearth of the grey walkway. In his lap lay a mound of coarse and strangely rigid hair which the god parsed through—mystified.

Even the lowest level of ghost could imitate human hair with more proficiency than this.

To himself, Xie Lian muttered, as if punched in the guts. “Is it the lack of spiritual energy? Is it the same with ghostly qi? Are the ghosts here so weak they can’t forge a proper imitation of hair?”

Wei Wuxian flopped next to him. “What’s ghostly qi? You mean resentment? This world is literally overflowing in resentment!” The demonic cultivator laughed, only a little mad at the edges. “Even the livings are full of it! Besides, that woman was no ghost—just a weirdo, I guess. How did she know what your husband looks like, though, didi?”

Xie Lian shook his head, at a loss himself.

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A short distance away, Shen Yuan had a migraine brewing.

It was impossible not to notice the teen in white daoist robes. Besides the fact the young man around seventeen was a celestial beauty with moonlit skin, honeysuckle eyes and unbelievably long silky hair that outclassed, by far, both Liu Qingge and Luo Binghe comhined (which was suspicious in and of itself), the boy was also glowing with spiritual powers.

Even more so than Luo Binghe.

Was this kid a fucking God or something?

Somehow, the man in dark robes sprawled next to the young beauty was even harder to miss. He was tall, unbelievably handsome, with long raven hair and striking silver eyes. No matter how much Shen Yuan probed him, he couldn’t find a trace of spiritual energy in this man, but the guy was spilling off demonic qi like a tide pool in a heartquake.

Even more so than Luo Binghe.

Shen Yuan narrowed his eyes. If there was one thing this master was good at, it was spotting protagonists. Those guys emitted main character vibes that had Shen Yuan’s protagonist spotting antenna vibrating in alarm—most definitely not NPCs.

But, were they allies?

Shen Yuan had no sense for that.

Chapter 3: Idiots Flock Together

“What are you two idiots doing sprawled in the middle of the street? You’re disturbing the peace.” Shen Yuan turned around in an imperious flick of his sleeve. “Follow this master.”

As if to prove him right, both protagonists trailed after this stranger like idiots—or lost little ducklings.

The gloomy man in dark robes spoke first. “Nice sword you got there, ge. Interesting face ornament too. What’s it for? Decipher scrolls?”

“They’re glasses, dipshit! Now shut up!” Shen Yuan snapped back.

He adjusted the green rim of his newfound glasses as he looked up the street names.

‘*Oh, babe, you forgot your glasses?’ a schoolgirl dressed up as his Binghe said. ‘Here! I keep those for my Shen Yuan cosplay!’*

Shen Yuan took the proffered glasses by the tip of his fingers. They were disgustingly his taste. ‘Why do you need glasses for a cultivator cosplay? Did that shitty author write something stupid again?’

His fake husband giggled. ‘Not Shen Qingqiu—Shen Yuan*.’*

Shen Yuan stopped dead in his tracks.

His soul left his body.

Obviously, this master did some research in the meantime—aka, Shen Yuan sat down in a shop and consumed in situ his own transmigration story written by some woman he never met!

Fuck.

Did Liu Mingyuan transmigrate here too?

“Hey, ge!” The handsome dude’s voice, deep and enthralling with an upturned lilt that contrasted sharply with the man’s dark circles and empty cheeks, stirred Shen Yuan out of his ruminations. “Who are you anyway? I’m… Wang Xian!”

Shen Yuan rolled his eyes to the skies. He need not look back to know Wei Wuxian showered the little god in conniving blinks.

Xie Lian smiled. “This one is Hua Lian.”

Mind you, Shen Yuan was not stupid. Once he finished with his own story, this scholar obviously read that woman’s later works. Must he say he was not impressed. Gays,

everywhere—disgusting! Regrets of Chunsang level of gay!! And no less plotholes and unanswered questions than that shitty airplane's dumbfuck novel!

Shen Yuan snapped his fan shut against his palm. "And I, Bing Qiu. Now, which one of you will tell this master what we need, and fast, if we want to survive in this capitalistic world?"

It was good this mortal had the advantage of both terrain and knowledge against those two powerhouses. If the system hadn't gone AWOL all of a sudden, Shen Yuan might even know what the fuck was going on.

"You tell us, ge." Wei Wuxian smirked, his demeanour more than simple complacency. Cockiness was more fitting of a term to describe the demonic cultivator.

Why so smug? You only die once!

Clearly that woman didn't put as much thought in your story as she did for this didi of ours! Xie Lian dies like a thousand times! Do you see him acting all cocky about it?!

Still, Shen Yuan knew better than to underestimate the dark and handsome young man. This was the youth who survived in the most inhospitable land of his world, battling against fierce corpses and spirits day and night without rest after his golden core had been coldly ripped out his lower dantian with surgical precision. He'd been whipped, stabbed, choked, punched, and thrown off a flying sword from the skies, yet he'd managed to survive that place, and invented a whole new path of cultivation as though he were the master of side quests—all of that within a matter of months.

Not unlike how Luo Binghe survived the Endless Abyss and came out as the Emperor of the Demon Realm.

Ugh.

Damn protagonists.

Fucking overachievers.

Clearly, this Wei Wuxian was at a Luo Binghe-level of intelligence, sturdiness, and charisma while Shen Yuan—well, Shen Yuan was just a little guy.

Fuck.

Maybe Wei Wuxian deserved to be a little smug, alright.

Turning back, Shen Yuan channel his inner Shen Qingqiu. He sneered. "Why, can't Wang-gongzi reflect this far? Must this master spell out every step of the way for you?"

"Ge," Wei Wuxian drawled, "why take offense? Clearly, our didi over here"—he pointed at Xie Lian—"is as lost as this one is in this strange realm, while I myself am terrified out of my wits. What this lowly one means is that Bing-ge seems awfully knowledgeable of this foreign world." A grin, seemingly full of fangs, glinted against the pouring sunlight. "Glasses? Capitalistic?" Silvery eyes flashed crimson. "Please do explain, ge."

Shen Yuan shivered.

Don't call this master Bing-ge, fucker!

Shen Yuan had to admit thought that the empty smile and the slightly cocked head of the kid in white who stood with both hands folded inside his sleeves looked rather clueless. How misleading! Clearly the traitor was trying and failing to connect to every single communication array in existence!

As for himself, Wei Wuxian looked all but terrified. The demonic cultivator leaned on Xie Lian—who barely shifted to accommodate the weight on his shoulders—and was about to taunt this master some more when he suddenly stared at the smaller youth. "Wow, didi, you're hiding those muscles quite good! You're about as sturdy as my Lan Zhan!"

Xie Lian blinked back to the present. "Who?" He smiled up at the man sprawled all over him. "Oh, the husband."

"Yeah! And Sizhui's our son!"

Shen Yuan nearly face-palmed, but this faker had more self-restraint than that, so he contented himself with a long suffering sight. "Fine! Both of you are a lost cause. This master doesn't have time to spare on such frivolous discussions. *My* husband could be about to blow up the multiverse for all I know, and you—"

Wei Wuxian looked up. "Multiverse?"

Shen Yuan minutely paled.

The protagonist took out his dizi and pointed it at this mere mortal. "Please, go on."

Shen Yuan spared him his most unimpressed look. Xie Lian, on the other hand, turned livid.

"Oh my," the god wheezed. Xie Lian obviously worried about his own husband's antics.

Shen Yuan could sympathize with that.

"In any case," Shen Yuan spat, "since *none of us*"—he weighted down his words with a baleful glare at Wei Wuxian—"know the easy way out of this situation, we must prepare to survive in this… unfamiliar environment." He landed a heavy gaze on both idiots. "Do you have money?"

Wei Wuxian shrugged. "I usually have my husband."

Xie Lian tucked his hands in his sleeves. He produced a half-eaten bun as his final answer.

"Wonderful." Shen Yuan rolled his eyes. "Aren't you glad this master found you, now? Come."

He set himself back in motion. All around, the crowd grew thicker yet seemingly more and more fluid as stiff jeans and clean-cut suits shifted to colorful silk and airy gauze.

Wei Wuxian pouted as he dragged his feet like a petulant child. Neither he nor the airhead seemed to notice to change in populace.

“Ge, Xian Xian is three, he can’t think about anything but lotus seeds and pork-rib soup!”

To that, Xie Lian quipped, “I don’t need much. I can sleep in a ditch just fine.”

The demonic cultivator hummed. “I personally prefer a cave. A cursed blood pool in its center is a must.”

“Those are interesting choices, gongzi. This one knows of a mountain with thousands of caves filled with ghostly qi. Once every millenium or so, it opens and millions of ghosts fight until only one winner remains.”

“What happens to the winner?”

“The mountain eats them up, melts them, and reforges them in a brand new being—an all powerful ghost. Ghost Kings are harbingers of death and destruction, capable of destroying countries like realms within a day. As exemple, my husband destroyed the Heavenly Realm!”

The sound of awe that escaped Wei Wuxian seemed to hold a trace of jealousy. “Didi, your world sounds great!”

The god grew grim. “Not all Ghost Kings are respectable souls, however.”

Walking briskly at the head of their procession, Shen Yuan couldn’t resist it anymore : he face-palmed.

‘*Your highness, with all due respect, ALL ghost kings are like this. Your husband is not, in any circumstances, an exception to the rule. You, are a fucking simp. The least destructive, if I must say, is Black Water Sinking Ship, and that’s because the guy is pathetic.’*

Wei Wuxian still laughed—a little mad. “That’s even better! Think they like the dizi?”

Was Shen Yuan the only sane person here? Was it because they were fictional men and he was, technically, not? Or did this sort of nonchalance naturally come to the all-powerful? Shen Yuan would never know.

The mortal let his hand slide down his face and dangle by his side. Shen Yuan stopped again. “Here. First we have to make money.”

Wei Wuxian, sidled up to Shen Yuan, and shrugged. “I only know how to plant radishes.”

Xie Lian slowly raised his hand with a gleam in his eyes. “I know how to collect junk and I can shatter boulders on my chest. I can also swallow swords, but I like selling trash better.”

“Didi!” Overeager, Wei Wuxian tugged on the kid’s white sleeve. “Show me how to later!”

“Collect junk?”

“No, swallowing swords! Does it world with spiritual sword too?”

Shen Yuan was disgusted.

This master cracked his bamboo fan on the pervert’s head.

“Ouch!”

“No need to dirty ourselves!” With a grand sweep of his sleeves, Shen Yuan spread his arms to the side. “Look around! This, my brothers, is where we make our fortune!”

Above this master’s head, a large banner announcing Shanghai’s annual danmei convention floated proudly. Already, fingers poking out wide sleeves of all color and make pointed at the trio while gasps echoed across the place.

Shen Yuan grinned as he took off his glasses. Green pheonix eyes shone like emeralds.

“Prep your smiles and fix your robes, brothers, for we are about to break the internet.”

Xie Lian blinked. “The what?”

Chapter 4: Money, Money, Money, Must be Funny

Xie Lian parsed through the bundle of paper cuts, a bemused expression on his face. “How much silver do you think this is worth?”

Wei Wuxian shrugged, most of his chest wildly exposed. “Probably not enough. Bing-ge said he’d tell us when he’s satisfied with our loot.”

At the back of their little stand, the mortal carrying a peerless spiritual sword at his hip laughed maniacally. Shen Yuan fiddled with a small hand-held device he procured with a fraction of their hard-earned money, a sadistic glint in his emerald eyes. Or maybe it was the distorted reflection of the light pouring out the device staining his phoenix eyes.

Looking around, nearly every mortals of this realm seemed to be equally entranced by that enchanted light. A demonic spell ought to be encrypted in those little devices.

Was this why they were brought to this world? To annihilate the demons corrupting these young minds?

“Kyaaa! Take a picture with me, twin!” a girl dressed up as a smaller and younger version of Wei Wuxian screeched, quickly followed by a dozen more enthused maidens.

The man in question motioned for calm. “Alright, ladies. Here are the ground rules : one picture is 100 yuans. Two is 200 yuans, and so on. If you want all three of us, it’s 300 yuans for as many pictures as you want. Deal?”

A deafening wave of youthful excitement rolled over the millennia old god.

Xie Lian sighed.

Young ladies these days were so much more energetic. Taking pictures was exhausting. Why were those maidens all dressed up as men, though? Shen Yuan said it was ‘trendy’, but the mortal’s explanation made as much sense to Xie Lian as if he were a man blinded from birth asking what the sky looked like only to be told the sky was blue.

Xie Lian asked what a ‘trend’ was. Shen yuan replied he was too old to understand.

“What the hell are you doing, guys?” Wei Wuxian called in his deep voice, a pair of ladies under each arm. “Didi, look, your husband is here again!”

“Gege!”

The demonic cultivator motioned to a maiden in crimson robes and cheap trinkets. Her beauty may be lacking, but her hair seemed realistic enough. A higher level mortal?

“Oh, look, look!” Wei Wuxian pointed with excitement. “Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan! This way!”

A tall individual in white mourning robes turned around.

Xie Lian didn't know whether to laugh or cry when yet another giggling and blushing lady in white clung to the demonic cultivator.

"Come on, brothers!" Wei Wuxian grinned. "Don't you know not to make ladies wait?"

Xie Lian dejectedly stored the thick brick of paper strips in his sleeve with the rest, rose, and followed the cackling mortal back to the frontlines. He'd rather drown in trash.

Didn't they have enough yet? Was this world truly this expensive?

Xie Lian sighed.

What greed did to men.

.

"Gege!"

Xie Lian pinched the space between his brow. With a dispassionate sigh, the god pointed to the sign Shen Yuan painted. "One picture for one hundred yuan, two pictures—"

Boom!

Xie Lian froze.

He stared at the bag, at least as tall and large as an adult man, overflowing with paper cuts.

"How many pictures can I get with this much, gege?" a youthful voice teased from above.

Xie Lian stared up from where he sat listlessly on the ground. A boy of at most fifteen smiled down at the god. Mirth twinkled in the youth's dark left eye, while his right eye shone crimson like a priceless gem.

A pointed canine, devilish, peaked from the child's thin lips as he grinned. "Just state your price, gege, and this San Lang will buy your freedom from that rascal."

Xie Lian jumped to his feet. "San Lang!"

Hua Cheng easily caught him. "Found you, gege," he said.

.

"Shizun! Shizun! Shizun!"

Shen Yuan whacked the overgrown man clinging to him like a barnacle to a ship on the head with the bamboo spine of his fan. "Enough! This master already promised to only take pictures with Binghe from now on, what more do you want from him?!"

"Promise to never leave this lowly one behind again, Shizun!" Luo Binghe lifted tear-stained cheeks and overflowing eyes to Shen Yuan.

This master couldn't help but pet the wild locks of this poor maiden with a heart of glass. "This master obviously never intended to part from Binghe. He is as much a victim here as Binghe," he scolded. "Shouldn't Binghe know better by now?"

The demon overlord whined miserably. "Shizun is wise. It's this lowly disciple who is at fault."

As Luo Binghe bent his head in penance, Shen Yuan took notice of the blade strapped to his husband's back. In his shock, he whacked Luo Binghe on the head again with his fan. "Is that Xin Mo?! Didn't it shatter when—"

Shen Yuan cut himself off.

When they papapa'd to save the world?!

Luo Binghe rubbed his cheek against the mortal's soft green robes. "Shizun," the grown man sniffled pitifully, "Shizun, this lowly disciple doesn't know anything. I woke up, and Xin Mo was there—"

Shen Yuan fanned himself aggressively. "It doesn't matter for now, Binghe. Just hand Xin Mo to someone else. Did it corrupt your mind?"

Shen Yuan did not want to papapa to save the world again!

"No, Shizun," Luo Binghe pouted.

Shen Yuan studied that expression with care. However, before he could determine whether his husband was telling the truth or not, a *mortal child* approached and carelessly seized Xin Mo with his bare hands.

"Gege, that sword is interesting. Do you want it? I can exchange E'ming for it." The kid prodded the black, fuming, murderous blade as if to gage the quality of the iron it was forged from. "E'ming is more powerful, though."

Shen Yuan gaped behind the privacy of his fan.

Hello?! This is Xin Mo—a demonic blade forged by resentment itself, the peak of demonic weaponry, the most powerful blade in all three realms!! Don't touch it, brat!

"Ah, San Lang," Xie Lian stepped it. The god grabbed the kid's slender wrist in one graceful motion, instantly catching the boy's interest. The two smiled tenderly at each other, until Xie Lian gently chastised his child husband—how inappropriate. "San Lang is mortal for now. He should be most careful not to injure himself." As he said this, a steady stream of spiritual energy poured from the god's graceful hand to the tip of the boy's fingers, scorched black by resentment. "It's too dangerous for San Lang to be near this Xin Mo at the moment. Also, E'ming is the sweetest. This one would not trade him for the world."

Hua Cheng grabbed his husband by their locked hands and deposed a fervent kiss over the delicate knuckles. "Of course, gege." His crimson eye burned with unrestrained passion.

A shiver coursed down Shen Yuan's spine.

Ugh.

Gays.

Also, PDA. Beurk.

Xie Lian coughed lightly to hide his embarrassment, but did nothing to untangle their fingers. Cheeks burning bright, he shot a sheepish look at Shen Yuan and Luo Binghe. "I'd carry Xin Mo on me—I actually have my share of experience with cursed blades—however…" The God motioned to the mortal teenager latched to his side. Hua Cheng actually had the guts to snicker at this master.

Just as Shen Yuan flashed the brat a middle finger within the privacy of his own mind, Wei Wuxian came back in a whirlwind, his own husband in tow.

"Guys, the food here is AMAZING—"

The tall and sickly thin man suddenly cut himself off with a drawn out gasp. All the bags he carried—all of them a vivid shade of red—scattered on the ground as the demonic cultivator sauntered forward. Lan Wangji wordlessly bent over and picked up the mess his husband caused.

Before anyone could comprehend how it happened, Wei Wuxian already clutched Xin Mo in his hands. His silver eyes twinkled brighter than the stars at night as he held the fuming black blade over his head. He spun in a perfunctory twirl. "My precious!"

Then, to Shen Yuan's utter dismay, the mortal man sucked the entirety of the millennia worth of pure, unadulterated resentment tainting the cursed blade into his own body. His eyes burned an even more vivid shade of crimson than Hua Cheng's infamous eye as the demonic cultivator cackled like a madman.

Shen Yuan and Xie Lian were petrified. Luo Binghe looked intrigued. Hua Cheng instantly lost all interest in Xin Mo, now rendered useless to him. It was not even worth displaying the scrap of iron in the most recluse corner of his husband's armoury. Lan Wangji barely spared a glance toward is husband, now laughing in a most evil way, as he organized the chips and ramen by flavour, ranking from spicy to spicy—as though nothing out of the ordinary happened.

Until the entire venue exploded.

Only then did Lan Wangji sigh.

"Wei Ying."

Chapter 5: Party Crashers

“It’s not my fault!” Wei Wuxian shouted over the chaos the moment his husband deposed him in a safe corner. The demonic cultivator looked rather vexed. “Lan Zhan. Why would you immediately think poor little me is to blame here? Am I that unreliable?”

Lan Wangji remained eloquently silent.

“I’m hurt,” Wei Wuxian harrumphed.

Lan Wangji’s amber eyes stayed impassive.

“Where, you ask?” Wei Wuxian said before he clutched his chest and lamented, “My *heart*.”

“Shut up!” From the cradle of Luo Binghe’s arms, Shen Yuan pointed his fan at the bastard. He stared him down imperiously. “What is wrong with you! What did you do to Xin Mo?! And you!” He whacked his fan on his husband’s thick head. “Have you thought to let this master down anytime soon?!”

“It’s not safe, and Shizun is—“

“I don’t care let me down!”

He let him down.

As Shen Yuan straightened his pristine robes furiously, both Xie Lian and Hua Cheng emerged from the cloud of smoke like a youthful couple enjoying a stroll in the forest. The screams of frightened mortals vying to escape the rain of debris might as well be birds’ happy chatters to their ears. A crimson umbrella shimmered in golden qi over their heads. The god held the wooden handle, the tilt of the umbrella in evident favor of the mortal child at his side, yet Hua Cheng kept pushing it back under his beloved’s amused and endeared gaze.

Jiang Cheng watched it all unfold from afar.

Standing tall and proud on the skeletal remains of a broken beam, the cultivator crossed his arm over his chest. Zidian slept around his finger, unbothered.

Luo Binghe’s crazy twin landed next to him like a goddamn shadow. His bloodied eyes glowed red along the demonic mark marring his forehead. They followed, unblinking, the slim figure in bamboo green robes gesticulating furiously, down and across the hall.

“Shizun,” he growled like a little beast.

On Jiang Cheng’s other side, Jun Wu clasped his hands in his back. “Xianle,” he tutted at the teen in white, another child in rags stuck to his side, “didn’t this master warn you against colluding with ghosts?”

As if on cue, both god and demon dived down.

Jiang Cheng said nothing. He remained motionless, arms crossed over his chest.

He only jumped down when twin half-demons bouldered into the beam he stood on.

.

Upon touching the dusty ground, Jiang Cheng raised Sandu. Thousands of silver sparks flashed in the air as his blade collided with the black jade of a demonic dizi.

He shouted, “Why the fuck are you attacking me, bastard!”

Wei Wuxian looked just as baffled. “Because you’re with them?! What am I supposed to do, wait until you stab me first like a gentleman? Don’t tell me you came to abduct me too?”

“Who’s with who!”

Retreating, Wei Wuxian brandished his hellish dizi before himself like a sword. “You! You’re with them!”

“With WHO?” Jiang Cheng’s patience was wearing thin. “I don’t even know them! What would I even want to do with you, anyway! I can’t stand watching you for a ke, please give me one good reason I’d want to kidnap you, and be stuck with you or your desiccated corpse any longer than I should, bastard!”

Wei Wuxian hummed. “Fair enough.” Having seemingly forgotten all about the fight he himself initiated not a breath ago, the fucker tucked Chengqing back at his waist. “Still, I saw you just now standing with the mourning guy and the pickling king—trying to pin your misdeeds on poor little me. You’ve been following their lead, haven’t you?”

“AND WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO?!” Jiang Cheng snapped. “It’s not like anyone else knows anything about this fucking world! I don’t even know why I got here! Are you asking for death, Wei Wuxian?” The cultivator sheated his sword. “I don’t mind strangling you with my own two hands, bastard!”

Wei Wuxian grinned. He pushed up his own sleeves. “How about you try, a-Cheng? You know da-shixiong never looses.”

With a deafening roar, Jiang Cheng threw himself at the cackling madman he still called his brother.

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“Unhand me, you worthless swine!”

Lan Wangji used all his strength to restrain the gangly mortal child trashing in his grasp.

“Dianxia needs me! Let me go!”

Far above, among the strings of clouds the caved in ceiling opened onto, thousands of swords clashed in the skies.

Lan Wangji sighed. “He does not. Hush.”

“You useless trash, I said—humph!”

The boy’s lips sealed shut. However, Hua Cheng only trashed harder, until—

Whack!

The boy stared, speechless, at the mortal man who dared smack him on the head.

Shen Yuan adjusted his glasses. “Damn brat.”

.

Luo Binghe looked back just in time to catch Shizun snapping his fan on the brat’s head.

Jealousy seized his heart.

With renewed vigor, the demon bared his fangs at him, that Shizun-killer, and sent his twin flying through the outer wall of the hall. The other Luo Binghe rolled across the street. He landed among a herd of metallic beasts gathered around the building—wailing. Circling their young, bigger specimens screeched in either fury or alarm—possibly both—while their mortal keepers instantly lifted the cane-like devices in their hands at the murderer.

“Hands up!”

“Don’t move!”

His twin jabbed the nearest stick-like device away with the tip of his claw; a disdainful sneer twisted his face. “What the—“

“Oh shit!”

Luo Binghe whirled around at the sound of Shizun’s voice. His husband—*husband*—flicked his fan at the disquieted herd and their alarmed shepherds.

“Fuck, it’s the police! They got guns! Binghe, tell didi to get down! NOW!”

In Luo Binghe’s back, a demonic snarl resounded, quickly drown by the explosive boom of the mortals’ devices detonating as one.

”*Run!*”

They ran.

Chapter 6: Pit Stop

Shen Yuan wheezed. Looking around, the self-proclaimed leader of their disparate gang raised his hand and came to a full stop. “Halt!”

He stood on shaky legs as everyone stopped, fresh as roses dunked in morning dew.

“Shizun—“

“I’m fine!” Shen Yuan snapped while dark spots filled his sight. The gasping mortal most definitely did not sway before he grasped his husband’s solid frame. With a pale and sweaty finger, Shen Yuan pointed at the store. “Alright, folks! Pit stop! Go in and pick up some age and period appropriate clothing! Don’t be too greedy, we’re short on money!” He checked his phone. “You got fifteen minutes. Start!”

Needless to say, it was a mess.

“Binghe, try the XXL shirt over there instead. Can’t you see the buttons are about to pop? What are you trying to do? Poke out this master’s eye? Ridiculous! Next!”

Luo Binghe walked away, dejected.

“Bing-ge, I really like this shop. What is it called?” Xie Lian eagerly took his place.

Shen Yuan eyed the little god in white cardigan. “It’s a thrift shop. And you look like a granny. Next!”

Hua Cheng, that little shit, deambulated the aisle like it were a fucking walkway. “How do I look?”

“Like a bloodstain. Next!”

Wei Wuxian sauntered over. Before the thin and shameless man could open his mouth, Shen Yuan spat out his tea and melon seeds.

“Those are women’s clothes, dipshit! Cover that bellybutton! Disgusting! Next!”

Thank the gods, Lan Wangji actually understood the fucking assignment. Shen Yuan nodded his head approvingly at this good child. All hope wasn’t lost for the next generation.

Last but not least, their newest addition, Jiang Cheng, shuffled over with his arms crossed. “Who are you? How come you know so much about this world, fucker?”

Shen Yuan fanned himself idly. “And what are *you*? An angry grape?”

The cultivator flushed so dark he turned purple—the color of his clothes down to his very underwear, this master was certain. “I’m a Jiang!”

“And I’m this man’s spouse.” Shen Yuan motioned to the demon overlord glowering their way. “Any more questions?”

Jiang Cheng grumbled a string of curses, but did not probe this faker any further.

After over an hour, Shen Yuan paid, begrudgingly, for their outfits, and the group walked away from the crime scene, unrecognizable.

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The idiots strolled inside the hotel hall like a troupe of clowns. Shen Yuan concealed his thin face behind his bamboo fan.

Like a country bumpkin, Wei Wuxian looked around with wide eyes. He whistled. “Did we just teleport again? Are we in Jinlingtai?”

Xie Lian did not dare touch the golden filigranes etched into the walls. “This resembles the Palace of Divine Might. Are you sure Jun Wu won’t find us here?”

“Shizun, do you like this style? I thought you hated Huan Hua Palace—“

Shen Yuan walked past them all, and pretended not to know a single one of those fools. He only spared his husband, to which this master threw a cryptic, “I do.”

The lady at the front clearly wasn’t paid enough to deal with weirdos. Her smile was more strained than Yue Qinyuan’s whenever Shen Qingqiu smuggled his husband on Qing Jing Peak.

“Good evening, sir. I need an ID and credit card—“

Shen Yuan slammed a stack of yuan on the counter. “You don’t. Give us your best room.”

.

Luo Binghe stared with morbid fascination as the little guy in white fleece fished a blue (?) ball of what looked like uncooked flesh out of the little box in his hands and offered the monstrosity to his child husband. Hua Cheng took a big bite, looking far too smug.

The half-demon waited for the mortal child to succumb to the throes of death, but Hua Cheng actually took a second bite, then a third. The meatball spasmed as it agonized in the mortal’s hand.

Fascinating.

“It was him,” Jiang Cheng pointed his chin at Luo Binghe, arms and legs crossed as he sat back on his velvet chair like it were a throne. “Or his evil twin. The guy is one sick fuck. Jun Wu might be the crazy fuck who brought us here, but the evil psycho twin is way more into it than the other fucker. Wouldn’t stop talking about his deadbeat Shizun.”

At this, Shizun coughed as he choked on his food. As everyone turned to him, Shizun raised his chopsticks in a self-explanatory maneuver. The purple goo dangling from them had most nodding in understanding; only Xie Lian remained perplexed and stared questioningly at Hua Cheng. The mortal brat shrugged and gobbled the last of his bruised bun.

Luo Binghe fiddled with his bowl of red chips, seemingly bored to death on the outside, but bubbling with jealousy on the inside. No matter how he turned it around in his head, he couldn't figure out why Shizun chose the god's lethal skills over his own. Was Shizun trying to die and escape him again?

Wei Wuxian easily caught the blackened bun Xie Lian handed him—though Luo Binghe was pretty sure the demonic cultivator hadn't bought any bun—then rammed his sharp elbow in his brother's side. "Jiang Cheng," Wei Wuxian said, "are you certain you should be telling us all this? What if your new buddies catch you speaking ill of them in their backs?"

Jiang Cheng ripped the bun out of the other's hands. He seemed about to shout something most offensive when he paused, and looked down in utter confusion. "Why is that thing harder than a rock?"

A deafening silence answered him until Xie Lian sighed. Hua Cheng patted his back. "Maybe gege can pour less water next time."

That explain nothing, but Jiang Cheng let the matter slide under Hua Cheng's insistent—threatening—glare. Still, like Luo Binghe, the man in purple made sure to keep his eyes on the little guy in white. With much reason, for when Jiang Cheng dropped the bun aside, the thing indented the ground on impact.

Whether the god was trying to murder them on purpose or accident remained uncertain.

Unfazed, Wei Wuxian instead grabbed the flaming red ball Xie Lian produced out of the final box. Taking a big bite, he munched for a while before commenting, "Not bad, didi, but it could use some more spices." He stared dejectedly down at the empty jar lying in his lap. "It's a shame I couldn't find more chili oil."

Xie Lian mumbled his thanks for the review.

Lan Wangji handed his husband his own (untouched) jar of chili oil.

By Luo Binghe's side, Shizun stared at it all in abject silence while slurping his purple goo.

Little did Shizun know even Luo Binghe's blood mites struggled to keep the mortal standing.

Chapter 7: Is it Foolproof if it's Devised by Fools?

Acutely aware of the mood his husband was in, as well as the threat to humanity it represented, Shen Yuan slurped the last of his noodles, then discarded the empty box at his feet. He grabbed his fan, and snapped it open.

"Now, let's talk business. What's the plan? What do they want from us?"

Jiang Cheng shrugged. "I don't know. They said a lot, but I don't speak crazy."

"I've defeated Jun Wu before. I can do it again," Xie Lian stated quite simply.

"Same," Luo Binghe nodded. "I just need to know Shizun is safe. Then I'll deal with the other me."

Shen Yuan patted his husband's head. Good boy. Don't let Bing-ge touch this master's limbs ever again.

With a shudder, Shen Yuan turned to the angry grape. "And you? Are you a threat?"

Jiang Cheng crossed his arms. "Depends. How fucked are you if I am?"

Wei Wuxian leant his brother's way. "Well, considering they're like, a literal god and a big bad demon, and you're basically—Ouf!"

"Get off, bastard!" Jiang Cheng punched the annoying mortal away. "Fuck you! As if I'm the most useless one here!"

The room tried very hard not to gaze Hua Cheng's way. The mortal child still found a way to glower at them all. Shen Yuan may be useless, but at least he was an adult.

It was this master's turn to snicker at the brat.

"A-Cheng!" Wei Wuxian's survival instincts truly were abysmal, for as soon as he caught his breath, he wrapped himself all around his brother's shoulders again. "Alright, this lowly one acknowledges your might. Still, the plan's pretty much to wait until your buddies find us again, then kick their asses. I'd say we can keep you around despite the uncertainty." He patted the cultivator's chest. "Besides, if you try to murder little old me in my sleep, Lan Zhan will gut you."

"Mn," Lan Wangji instantly backed his say.

Shen Yuan had to say he was impressed. The man's blank expression hadn't shifted a millimetre since they first met. If the cultivator sat in a room with none other than Liu Qingge as his sole company, and Shen Yuan had to bet on who would speak first, he'd vote for the chair.

He'd probably win.

Unfazed, Jiang Cheng shook Wei Wuxian off again. “Fuck! I said get off, bastard! You’re as crazy as those two fuckers if you think I’d ever get within range of you freaks at *night*! I have enough listening to Old Man Lan’s grievances; if I have to murder you, I’ll do so while you’re fully clothed, thank you!”

“No, no,” Wei Wuxian shook his head, “I thank *you* for your consideration.” He shot one last blinding grin his brother’s way—answered by a murderous frown and the ominous crackling of Zidian—before addressing the rest of them. “Jiang Cheng’s all bark but no bite. He’s safe.”

“Hey!”

“Hush, Chengcheng. I’m trying to fool them.”

“I’ll show you ‘no bite’ bastard! Say one more word and I’ll break your legs, Wei Wuxian!”

The bastard’s grin widened. “One more word.”

Jiang Cheng vibrated in outrage. “Hey!”

To the room, Wei Wuxian motioned from his intact legs to the seething cultivator shrouded in a crackling cloud of purple static. “See? Utterly harmless.”

Xie Lian gave a polite round of applause.

Shen Yuan nodded. “Alright. He’s your villainous counterpart anyway. You look after the angry grape.” The matter resolved, Shen Yuan flicked his fan shut against his palm. His eyes shone, greedy. “Now that we have devised a foolproof plan, this master refuses to remain idle. To busy ourselves, I thought we could—”

“I’m banned from the casino,” Hua Cheng warned, as if reading this master’s mind.

Shen Yuan deflated. “Already?! How can you, you’re like fifteen!”

The gangly teenager shrugged. “I needed money to buy gege’s freedom. And I don’t like to resort to slavery, unlike you.”

“And I don’t enjoy watching mortals lose their limbs in bloody bets, unlike you,” Shen Yuan snarked back.

“Oh?”

Shen Yuan shivered. Why did that mortal child’s smirk seemed filled with fangs?!

The brat purred, “So you know about my Gambler’s Den too? Interesting.”

Luo Binghe bared his own fangs. “Shizun is a renowned scholar,” the Heavenly Demon, twice that child’s size, growled. “He obviously knows all about your miserable realm, brat.”

Moved, Shen Yuan clutched his heart. How heart-warming. His husband had such misplaced faith in this professional faker.

And the poor soul went on : “He may be in a younger version of himself, but Shizun remains as knowledgeable as his immortal self!”

Just then, Wei Wuxian had to pipe in. “Yeah about that, this one has a theory : we all came back as we were before death, is that it?”

Everyone, Shen Yuan included, nodded gravely. It definitely made much sense! That would explain why he suddenly found himself back in his original body—

Shen Yuan turned pale as a ghoul.

Fuck.

From the corner of his eyes, Shen Yuan spotted the little shit opening his mouth.

Fuck, fuck, fuck! Abort!

But it was too late. Powerless, Shen Yuan could only stare as Hua Cheng helpfully pointed out :

“*First* death.”

Xie Lian nodded emphatically.

A long string of fucks strangled Shen Yuan’s thoughts as the man screamed internally.

Obviously, wet puppy eyes turned to him.

Outed!

Shen Yuan had been outed against his will!

.

While most looked appalled, Wei Wuxian’s silver eyes glimmered. He folded his hands over his knees, and bent Hua Cheng’s way. “Fascinating,” he breathed. “Tell us more.”

However, before Hua Cheng could elaborate, Luo Binghe whimpered disgustingly. The overgrown man seemed on the verge of tears as he reached for his husband.

Interestingly enough, Shen Yuan paled further as his husband seized his hand. “Shizun? What does he mean, Shizun? Shizun died in this lowly one’s arms! Shouldn’t Shizun have returned as an immortal?” The grasp the demon had on his mortal spouse tightened. With bruising strength, he clutched Shen Yuan and wailed, “Why is Shizun mortal now! Is it a trick?! Are you planning to leave this lowly disciple behind again?! Answer me!”

Hua Cheng glared. He would never.

Never would this filthy one touch Dianxia in any way which would hurt him.

Maybe that worthless trash had more in common than he let on with his evil twin.

And yet, the mortal gingerly patted the hand crowned in sharp claws clutching his limb—utterly unafraid. Shen Yuan sighed. “It’s a long story, Binghe.” A small and tired smile graced his lips. His cutting emerald eyes softened considerably as the mortal promised, “I’ll tell you one day, Binghe, okay? Just not now. You have my word. Or do you doubt this master?”

Luo Binghe only dithered for another breath. Soon, he cradled his husband’s hand in the well of his palms and pressed his lips fervently over fair knuckles. Breathless, the demon said, “Shizun can take all the time he needs. This lowly disciple won’t ever doubt Shizun again!”

Shen Yuan moved to pat the man’s wild mane instead. “Good boy.”

As Hua Cheng gagged, Jiang Cheng snapped his jaws around Dianxia’s blackened bun the ingrate fool first discarded as trash. Clearly the cultivator prayed for death to take him away from those disgusting lovebirds. Hua Cheng, while he judged the means, actually understood the sentiment : only Dianxia’s palm rubbing soothing circles over his back kept the mortal child from taking his own life here and now in search of reprieve.

The bun proved to be unbreakable.

The idiot in purple grumbled profanities as he stared at the bun which rested in his palm like a cannonball, then at the dent it previously carved in the ground at his feet.

In the end, the fool tucked it in his pocket.

It would, surprisingly, prove to be a wise choice.

Chapter 8: A Troupe of Clowns

Their little troupe stumbled out the five-star hotel and into the street the next morning. Shen Yuan instantly lifted his fan high in the air like a flag. “Alright, group! Listen!”

Lan Wangji, that good child, stood at attention. As for the rest—

“So you mean, he”—Wei Wuxian pointed his dizi Hua Cheng’s way—“died thrice so far.”

“The ‘so far’ feels a bit unnecessary—“

“While you”—he snapped Chengqing the god’s way—“passed several times, but not really.”

“Well, I had a shackle granting the highest level of immortality—“

Wei Wuxian fished a sheet of paper and a pencil out of nowhere. He pushed both items into Xie Lian’s face. “I will need a detailed reproduction of those runes, thank you.”

Hua Cheng snatched the paper out his husband’s twisted face. “I’ll do it.” The mortal child smirked, overly smug, and for good reasons.

Moments later, Wei Wuxian stared at the seemingly meaningless mess of lines smeared in black ink all over the sheet, pondering. Eventually, the demonic cultivator and talisman genius tapped the scribbles with his finger. “This is accurate?”

Xie Lian squinted as he looked. He bent his head this way and that. “I’ll need to look closer, if you could just lend me this…”

All the while, Jiang Cheng repeatedly dropped the noodles turned bun turned cannonball on the ground. Every time, the sidewalk exploded in a small shower of dust and debris.

Shen Yuan pinched the space between his brow. He took in a deep breath.

And Luo fucking Binghe hovered around this master like a worried mother hen ever since they shared breakfast. “Shizun, what’s wrong? Is Shizun feeling unwell? May this lowly one help in any way? Maybe more blood mites—“

“ENOUGH!”

By the time Shen Yuan looked up again, a crater had formed before Jiang Cheng, while Wei Wuxian and Xie Lian sat on the bare pavement. They lifted their heads, their intense debate over the nature of a certain rune cut short by the mortal’s bellow.

Hua Cheng snickered like the little shit he was, Luo Binghe looked crestfallen, and Lan Wangji stood straight and stiff as a dummy.

Under Shen Yuan’s baleful glare, Jiang Cheng bent over in a quiet rustle of purple.

The bun remained intact.

Shen Yuan breathed out. “Kindergarten kids are more disciplined than you all.”

Wei Wuxian raised his hand at the very same moment Shen Yuan realised he fucked up.

“What’s a kindergarden? Do the people here actually grow their kids like little radishes?!”

.

They, somehow, made it to the fair.

Before setting his charges free like rabid dog, Shen Yuan warned, “Remember : if anyone comes across the tombola, *do not engage*. Go get either Binghe or the little shit, ‘kay?”

Xie Lian quietly raised his hand.

“Alright. I mean *Hua Cheng*. Happy?”

Xie Lian descended his arm.

Instead, Jiang Cheng scowled. “That’s it? What’s even a ‘tombola’? What if one of us comes across, I don’t know, a crazy fucker in white, or your puppy’s evil fucking twin?!”

The puppy in question bared his fangs at the cultivator like a feral beast. “Watch your tone if you must speak to Shizun!”

Jiang Cheng glared back, unimpressed. The man was, after all, armed with an indestructible bun.

No matter, fearless, Shen Yuan pressed his bamboo fan into his husband’s chest. Stepping back in front of the Heavenly Demon, he shrugged. “Throw your bun at them, I guess. Now, scram!”

They scrammed.

“And don’t forget the tombola!” Shen Yuan shouted after them.

.

Wei Ying was happy.

“Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan, look! What kind of spells do you think they’re using?!“

Lan Wangji looked up from the hand-held device in his grasp. Mortals screamed past the cultivator in white at neck-breaking speed.

Lan Wangji looked back down. “Mn.”

He ‘scrolled’ through the string of pictures he’d taken of Wei Ying navigating the fare.

"*Lan Wangji." Shen Yuan approached the man in confidence last evening. Looking both ways, frantic, the strange mortal smuggled the device into Lan Wangji's hands. "You're a good child, Lan Wangji. Your uncle raised you well. If anything happens tomorrow, call me, and I'll do the same, got it?"*

Lan Wangji nodded.

Lan Wangji had no idea how to make a 'call'.

He knew how to take pictures, though.

Close-by, Wei Ying harassed a local man. "What do you mean you don't know how the thing works? Aren't you operating the wagons? Who's powering the runes of the spell!"

The mortal looked at a loss. "Gas?"

"Who's that? Can I speak to them?"

Before the local could reply, Lan Wangji's device came alive. The stoic cultivator looked around, hand extended before himself, as the demon Xie Lian insisted was hidden inside trashed and chanted an incantation in a language Lan Wangji did not recognize.

Wei Ying came strutting back. "Gimme that." His husband shamelessly picked up the device. Without hesitation, Wei Ying pressed a green rune, and screamed, "Who are you and what do you want from this Laozhu, demon!"

"*Fuck, not you!*" A distorted voice sounding vaguely like Shen Yuan's cursed. "*Whatever, shut up! They're here!*"

Wei Ying pursed his lips. Dubious, he searched the device both sides—looking for a trap.

"*Hello?! Are you there?*"

Wei Ying dangled the device before his face by the tip of his fingers. "Who am I?"

A long suffering sigh blew out the device. "*Wang Xian*," it drawled, disgusted.

Wei Ying instantly brightened. "Bing-ge! Who's here? The tombola guys?"

The slap of a palm resounded across the space dividing their communication devices.

"*Bing-ge,*" Shen Yuan despaired.

Wei Ying and Lan Wangji exchanged a quizzical look. "Yeah?" his husband said.

The device exploded.

"*FOR FUCK'S SAKE! BING-GE'S HERE!*"

A loud breath. Then—

"*He's on top of the fucking Ferris wheel!*"

.

From the top of the wide metallic wheel, Luo Binghe smirked, his bloodied eyes pinned on the tall and lanky man in soft bamboo green matching his face ornaments. He gesticulated wildly as he spoke into a little device.

Their eyes met, and never parted since.

"Shizun," the demon purred.

Luo Binghe refused to leave this world empty-handed. Either he got his hands on Shen Qingqiu, or he destroyed the realms trying to.

Chapter 9: Making F-F-Friends

“Gege, this San Lang promises to be good,” Hua Cheng swore as Dianxia hauled him against the tide of screaming mortals. “Please don’t leave him in that man’s cruel clutches?”

Dianxia huffed tenderly. “Is Lan Wangji cruel for keeping you alive since San Lang can’t seem to comprehend he is a precious mortal?”

Hua Cheng’s lips twisted into a resentful sneer. “Yes.”

Despite Dianxia’s amused laughter, this obviously was the wrong answer. The moment the couple emerged from the throngs of alarmed mortals evacuating the premises, Lan Wangji seized Hua Cheng’s shoulders. The child glared, murderous, at the shitstain before turning big pleading eyes to his husband. However, no matter how faithfully Hua Cheng begged his husband, Dianxia took no pity.

The god instead stared, serene, at the massive wheel lying in a heap of torn metal over the fair’s grounds. Above their heads, high in the skies, both Luo Binghe fought tooth and nail, caught at each other’s throat.

Hua Cheng spat on the ground.

He hated how useless his mortal form was.

When he looked up again, at the head of their group, Shen Yuan looked this close to throttle Wei Wuxian.

“No, *this* is our Binghe! Not *him*! They look nothing alike! How can you not—“

The weird mortal was cut off by a loud cheer as a Luo Binghe crashed into the remains of the wheel and the other descended upon the former in manic laughter.

“Hand me Shizun!”

“Never!” Luo Binghe roared.

They sprang back into the sky.

As Wei Wuxian’s misplaced cheering was muffled by a fair palm slamming over his lips, Hua Cheng crossed his arms and hummed, unimpressed. Being the same person from different realms, Luo Binghe and his evil psycho twin unsurprisingly managed to pick similar outfits.

Still, wasn’t it evident who was who?

Apparently not, for the next time a Luo Binghe splattered on the ground and Wei Wuxian booed, Shen Yuan pulled on his hair. He screeched : “You’re taking for the wrong team, you fucking lunatic! Shut up!” At the end of his rope, the mortal caught the demonic cultivator by

the collar and shook him as he pointed at the Luo Binghe with wild curls. “This is Bing-mei! The Luo Binghe with the maidenly heart of glass, okay?!”

Wei Wuxian looked at a loss.

“The crybaby,” Hua Cheng clarified.

“Ah!”

“Exactly. Now,” Shen Yuan said as he pointed to the other Luo Binghe with straight hair, “this is Bing-ge : a sadistic demon overlord with a harem of flowers in the three digits who hates his Shizun’s guts, and thus *my* guts. Got it?”

“The crazy fucker,” Jiang Cheng summarized.

Everyone nodded in understanding.

Even Jun Wu listened attentively. “Interesting. How does the young master know of all this? Are there ancient texts this master should be aware of?”

Their entire troupe of clowns whirled around.

.

“Jun Wu!” Xie Lian exclaimed. The god unsheathed his sword and pointed it at his nemesis. “Everybody get back!”

Hua Cheng made to step before his husband, but Lan Wangji’s unforgiving grasp tightened around the mortal’s shoulder. “Don’t.”

“Not again, you worthless—humph!”

Lips sealed, Hua Cheng could only glare as Lan Wangji pulled him back to safety.

A rather pleased light twinkled in Jun Wu’s eyes at the sight of the calamity being manhandled by a mere mortal cultivator. The god stood, tall and mighty, as he swiped his hand in a dismissive gesture. “No need for introductions, Xianle. I believe our friend over here must have spoken extensively of this master’s identity and intentions already.”

Jiang Cheng did not, but whatever.

Oblivious, Jun Wu went on, “You must be wondering, however, why this master is now standing here by your side. Unfortunately, I fear I might have lost the grasp on the situation. This Bing-ge the young master speaks of may or may not have overtaken the reins of the operation.”

Xie Lian stared at the other god, uncertain of his intentions. He did not lower his weapon.

Quite awkwardly, silence stretched on.

Finally, Wei Wuxian nudged Xie Lian in the ribs. In a non-whisper, he pointed out for the good of the group : “He wants to make friend.”

A hum of understanding washed over the disparate gathering.

At the back, only Hua Cheng pumped his fists and shouted a muffled, “Stab him!”

Fondness filled his heart as, sword in hand, Xie Lian leveled the fallen god—now back to his prime as the Crown Prince of Wuyong—with a disappointed stare.

In the end, Xie Lian could only sigh, and lower his blade. “Jun Wu… I spare your life, gift you my hat, and trust you can atone for your sins despite everything you put us through—is this charade all the growth you have to show this one, Jun Wu?”

Jun Wu shook his head. “Do not fear, Xianle. This master did not forget your grace. I left the bamboo hat under Mount Tonglu for Nianqing to find.” The god gazed up at the sun as if to gage the time. The sigh he let out sounded rather lonely. “He’s yet to touch it, or else he’d be among us.”

Little did they know that, universes away, a very confused Mei Nianqing sat, fingers crossed over his mouth, before a hat with a glowing red sigil flashing (forebodingly) over knitted bamboo straws laying under Mount Tonglu in lieu of his charge. Mei Nianqing, the only responsible soul out there, did not dare press that big red button.

Not yet, at least.

Anyways, in this realm, Xie Lian sheathed his weapon. “You know this is not what I meant, Jun Wu.” He motioned at the whole of them, at the twin demons fighting in the skies, and at the entirety of this strange and foreign world.

“Why, Jun Wu?” was all Xie Lian asked.

The culprit clasped his hands in his back. He shrugged. “Boredom is most evil in and of itself, Xianle. Does this one need a better reason than the mere need for distraction?”

By Xie Lian’s side, Wei Wuxian shook his head. “No you don’t.” Fearless—or shameless—he stepped forward, and pressed an emphatic hand over their enemy’s shoulder. “I get it.”

Xie Lian pinched the space between his brows.

A little further back, Lan Wangji closed his eyes, as though in great pain. “Wei Ying!”

Xie Lian did not dare imagine everything this poor soul was put through on the daily because of ‘boredom’ to react as such.

Wei Wuxian whirled around. “What? It’s true! What’s more cruel than being locked between four walls for all eternity! Death is more lenient!”

Before anyone could raise a counter argument, the ground suddenly rumbled under their feet.

High above, Bing-ge laughed maniacally. “Are you so weak you think I can’t do anything of worth without Xin Mo, brother?” the Heavenly Demon spat the last word like it disgusted him. “If you won’t surrender Shen Qingqiu, then brace yourself, Crybaby!”

In a thunderous roar, cracks spread between their feet as the earth spilt open.

Bing-ge’s eyes glowed crimson, maddened by the years. “Do you remember, brother? Do you remember everything we went through because of Shen Qingqiu, brother!” The demon enunciated his shizun’s name one spiteful syllable at the time. “Clearly you don’t. May the Endless Abyss remind you of how we suffered.” Bing-ge sneered. “*Brother*.”

Under their helpless eyes, as if summoned by the Heavenly Demon’s roaring laughter, the Endless Abyss opened.

From its gaping mouth, hordes of demonic beasts surged from the depths of the underworld, their numbers endless.

To the speechless troupe, Jun Wu clicked his tongue. “Hum. Let’s get rid of all this before Nianqing arrives, shall we?”

Chapter 10: Major Character Death

Chapter Notes

Two chapters in one day, is it Christmas?

Hua Cheng snickered as the unshakable grasp on his shoulders lifted. More and more demonic beasts and other unsightly creatures pouring out the Endless Abyss in torrents, Lan Wangji had no choice but to join the fray along Dianxia and the rest of the rabble. The cultivator spared Hua Cheng one last warning glare before summoning his sword, guqin his hands.

The mortal child was about to follow when the bamboo spine of a fan cracked his head open.

“Don’t even think about it! Unless you can prove your death contributes to victory, this master will not turn a blind eye, little shit!”

.

This Laozhu forgot to mention earlier, but the fair happened to be built over an old, very old, cemetery.

Wei Wuxian thus ran across the cheery grounds of the fair, laughing. With a few wretched notes of his dizi, the earth overturned as hundreds of gleamy white hands clawed their way to freedom. The demonic cultivator cackled madly.

“They’re alive!”

Wei Wuxian’s demented laughter soon died, however, as bodies looking far too fresh for these millennia old graves joined his rapidly growing corpse army. As more and more living mortals—entranced by Chengqing—sidled up to the demonic cultivator, theirs numbers quickly eclipsed the dead’s.

The necromancer shook his dizi. “What the hell? Did it break?”

“Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Cheng landed next to him. With a savage punch to his brother’s shoulder, he shouted, “Bastard, you dare?! Is the dead not enough for your ego anymore? Must you make the living into your mindless puppets now too?!”

“It’s the resentment!” The voice boomed above their heads. Like a true god, Xie Lian seemingly spoke from the heights of the Heavens as he shouted, “Wang-gongzi said it himself : even the living harbor resentment in this realm! It comes from their screens!”

Wei Wuxian snapped his fingers. “Right!” One arm crossed over his chest, the other holding up his chin, he mused, “With this much bodies to control at once, though… I don’t know how *not* to pull them in, you know?”

Jiang Cheng fumed. “Just break the spell and free them, imbecile! Then go sit down!”

“Aiya, a-Cheng! Aren’t you supposed to be the villain here? Where did you find those morals? I’m getting there, alright, take a deep breath.”

With a swift twirl of his dizi, the necromancer’s powerful enchantment shattered. Countless clueless mortals regained consciousness among heaps of crumpled bones.

Like a devil, Wei Wuxian grinned. “Boo.”

They ran away screaming.

The demonic cultivator turned back to his brother. “There. Happy?”

But Jiang Cheng was already gone. High in the skies, Zidian crackled as the whip zipped across the clouds and connected with the snake-like appendage of a massive horned beast.

Wei Wuxian shrugged.

He waded to the sidelines, and sat on the bench, crammed between Shen Yuan and Hua Cheng—utterly useless. Shen Yuan offered him his bag of melon seeds, which Wei Wuxian declined. The mortal instead cradled his cheek in his palm, and twirled Chengqing, a petulant pout on his face.

Wei Wuxian sighed, bored to death.

A dangerous state.

.

Hua Cheng had an idea.

Dianxia wouldn’t like it.

However, even more than displeasing Xie Lian, Hua Cheng hated his own ineptitude and idleness.

It was high time they changed this.

Thus, the mortal child rose and kicked the restless demonic cultivator in the shin. “Get up, dipshit. I have a plan.”

Wei Wuxian looked up from the nest of ants he was stirring up with a broken twig. He blinked. “And you’re coming to little old me with this plan?”

Hua Cheng stared and said nothing.

Wei Wuxian raised a brow. “Are you sure? We don’t know anything about the realms of this world.”

“It doesn’t matter.” The youth’s mismatched eyes shone fervently as he declared, blessed with endless faith, “I pray to never rest in peace.”

Wei Wuxian leveled Hua Cheng’s resolved gaze with his own bright gaze. Finally, the demonic cultivator grinned widely—his expression only a little mad at the edges.

Shen Yuan scooted further away.

A sword, once a mighty demonic tool, now barely more than a slab of cold iron, landed in Hua Cheng’s hands.

Wei Wuxian rose. “I can work with that.”

Hua Cheng grabbed Xin Mo in both hands. The cutting edge of the sword pressed against his jugular, the child smiled.

“Dying for His Highness is my greatest honor.”

Blood splattered all over the ground.

.

Shen Yuan shut his eyes and blocked his ears.

Fucking protagonists.

Self-sacrificial fools, the lot of them.

…

…

…

Wait.

No, no, no!

Don’t come at this master calling him an hypocrite! This master was built different : he only killed himself to save his own life!

The only selfless thing Shen Yuan ever did was to papapa to save the world! It doesn’t count!

.

Moments later, Wei Wuxian pretended to come across Hua Cheng’s warm corpse by chance.

He looked around. “Oh, hey! A fresh body full of resentful energy! Lucky me!”

He knelt down, and prodded the unmoving corpse of the gangly teen with Chengqing. Into the boy's ear, in a low voice, Wei Wuxian taunted fate itself.

"Awake yet?"

Chapter 11: One Person is All it Takes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Twang!

A the strum of the qin, a wave of cool spiritual qi fell from the Heavens and washed over the entire colony of flesh-eating critters.

“Now!” Xie Lian shouted, his own ten thousand swords busy holding back a heard of black-moon rhinoceros-pythons.

Jiang Cheng dashed across the fair’s grounds littered with the corpses of countless demonic beasts. Right in the center of the fair, swarming the waters of a medium-sized pool upon which plastic wooden-like canoe floated, a mass of darkness trashed, one harried Jun Wu caught in its clutches. Black, hair-like tendrils cut the blood flow throughout the god’s limbs and vied to drown the man beneath murky waters. Golden qi sparked over the god’s sallow skin, the spiritual energy ridiculously feeble against the crushing amounts of resentment pouring out the Nu Yuan Chan in torrents.

“I’m almost out!” Jun Wu wheezed.

Which was their entire problem.

Only Xie Lian—used to fighting with as little spiritual energy as possible—and Lan Wangji—this reasonable child—still possessed significant amounts of qi. Unlike the Luo Binghes tearing at each other as quickly as they could heal, none of the spiritual and physical cultivators gathered here could replenish their stores of spiritual powers from the overflowing resentment of this realm : they depended on the ambiant qi.

Which was nonexistent.

Jiang Cheng had long run out of qi. The mortal cultivator put all his might on his physical capacities as he sprinted at neck-breaking speed, Zidian curled, useless, around his finger.

It didn’t matter.

Jiang Cheng had another secret weapon.

With a bestial roar, the mortal man catapulted the projectile in his hold with all his strength.

It landed in the water like a cannonball.

Instantly, thousands of hair-like teguments surged up and back down like a waterfall of pitch. The Nu Yuan Chan snatched the projectile which disturbed its peace; with unbearable force, the beast shattered the cannonball to smithereens.

Jiang Cheng smirked.

From the sidelines, Shen Yuan fanned himself idly. Like a poisoned bath-bomb, Xie Lian's bun intoxicated the waters of the log ride.

The Nu Yuan Chan dropped dead on the spot.

Jun Wu, the lucky fellow, tumbled on dry grounds, away from the lethal pool of water.

"I told you it would work," Shen Yuan rubbed it in their faces. "And yet you insisted this master sits down and twiddles his thumbs."

Three harried faces turned to the mortal. As for Lan Wangji, the stoic cultivator looked the same as usual—his clothes pristine and his face seemingly carved out the purest jade despite death and chaos surrounding them.

Only his hard amber eyes looked exhausted.

And yet, demons kept sprouting out the Endless Abyss like weeds.

"This can't go on," Xie Lian landed next to Jiang Cheng. The mortal cultivator struggled from his knees to his feet with the god's helping hand. An entire heard of black-moon rhinoceros-pythons lay, defeated, in the martial god's wake. "Soon we'll all be out of powers. Is there any faster way to close the Endless Abyss?"

"Other than defeating the evil psycho twin?" Jiang Cheng crossed his arms and raised a brow. "That thing is more potent than the Burial Mounds. Even Wei Wuxian can't—"

"HA HAH HA HAH HA HAH HA!"

Paper fan raised before his face like a shield, Shen Yuan retreated back into the sidelines.

Summoned like a devil, Wei Wuxian's tall, skeletal frame emerged from the ruins of the Ferris wheel—wracked by maniacal laughter. His silver eyes filled with the blood of his victims, Wei Wuxian sauntered their way. In one hand, he brandished a black dizi in the air like a flag; in the other, the demonic cultivator carried a… red cup?

Wei Wuxian handed his drink to Jiang Cheng. "Hold my beer."

Then, far too soberly, the demonic cultivator raised Chengqing to his lips.

Cast again the dying sun, Wei Wuxian wrecked the skies with the demented melodies of a demonic dizi. Even to Shen Yuan's novice ears, its meaning rang crystal clear in his mind :

Kill.

The thing the necromancer unleashed launched itself at the Endless Abyss and its dwellers so fast, a blurred, crimson afterimage was all they could catch.

Like a bloodstain splattered in their eyes.

Xie Lian froze.

“San Lang?”

Hua Cheng’s fierce corpse did not look back.

For it *killed*.

.

Xie Lian might be dying.

The god turned bloodshot eyes to the man he entrusted his beloved to. Only now did he truly register Lan Wangji’s poised and quiet presence by his side, and all it entailed.

“How could you!” Xie Lian seized the cultivator’s collar. His hands shook terribly as he bellowed, “I, TRUSTED YOU, LAN WANGJI!”

Lan Wangji said nothing. All he did was raise his hand and point his finger at Shen Yuan.

Shen Yuan instantly flung the blame to Wei Wuxian, and Wei Wuxian, eyes wide and lips pressed to his dizi, shamelessly pointed his own bony finger to the gangly corpse wreaking havoc among demonic beasts ten times his size, if not more.

Like a broken puppet, Xie Lian crumbled to the ground—defeated.

Face caught in his hands, he didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. Of course it was his San Lang’s idea!

It was far too believable to refute.

“Gege,” a wispy voice whispered in his ear.

Xie Lian jerked up. Against tear stained cheeks, a tiny ghost fire pressed itself, its touch cool and whimsy.

As though it vied to wipe the god’s tears.

“Gege, don’t cry.”

Tears rolling off his chin, Xie Lian hiccuped. “I’m not crying!” Cradling the precious ghost fire of his beloved, Xie Lian sobbed. “I’m really not!”

“Don’t fear, gege. I pray to never rest in peace,” the little ghost fire reiterated. “Not as long as my beloved is still in this world.”

Finally, Xie Lian laughed. “Yes! I believe you!”

“No.” The ghost fire surged from the god’s hands. Pressed against Xie Lian lips, it whispered in a prayer, “I believe in *you*. Always.”

Xie Lian shut his eyes. He inhaled, slow and deep, as, in his lower dantian, the half-depleted pool of his qi roiled.

“I am forever your most devoted believer, Dianxia.”

Until it overflowed.

How could he forget?

All Xie Lian ever needed was one person.

Once again brimming with spiritual powers, Xie Lian rose. He wiped his tears. Then, a cool and tiny ghost fire nestled in the crown of his hair, the God extended his hand before himself —palm turned to the Heavens.

To the ragged mortals and god, he asked, “Who needs spiritual powers?”

Several wretched hands raised.

“Alright.” Scratching his cheek, Xie Lian let out a rueful laugh. “This one can share.”

Chapter End Notes

Only one or two chapters left.

What do you think so far? Is this going the way you thought it would? Y’all aren’t too talkative haha. Please do write your thoughts in comments, I love to read you guys!

See ya!

Chapter 12: A Proud (?) Father

They were so fucked.

Not that things were going particularly bad. Actually, considering they were battling the entirety of the Endless Abyss, things could be going a whole lot worst. Like, really worst.

Only the little shit died so far!

And you know what? It didn't count. Hua Cheng took his own life. If he wanted for his name to be scribbled down in the books as a heroic martyr, he shouldn't have sliced his own damn throat like an idiot.

Still, things weren't looking bright either.

Overhead, the skies were wreaked by twin shadows clashing together again and again in electric sparks like thunderclouds from either side of the world colliding. Evenly matched, the fight between Bing-ge and Bing-mei kept going strong. Just now, both Heavenly Demons ripped the other's arm, only for the missing appendages to regrow within a handful of blinks. As neither managed to get the upper hand, as both protagonists were graced with endless stamina, and as it seemingly was in their fucking nature to obsess over Shen fucking Qingqiu, the rounds just kept piling up with no clear winner in sight. Meanwhile, Bing-ge's resentment was allowed to fester; the Endless Abyss remained wide open.

Quite heart-movingly, Xie Lian fought back to back with his nemesis Jun Wu, the pair of gods enshrouded in twin storms of ten thousand swords. Zidian crackled in purple lightning throughout the shower of blades, naturally accompanied by the melodious strums of a spiritual qin like thunder's reply.

At ground level, Wei Wuxian's fingers flew over the black jade of his demonic dizi in frenzied rhythms. Hua Cheng, that multitasker, went from being utterly useless to being the crutch of the entire operation : not only did the little shit graciously lend his body to science, his ghost fire worked overtime powering most of their disparate troupe of idiots. Snuggled into his god's silky hair, the flimsy little thing prayed fervently, utterly unbothered by how his carnal envelope was being experimented on by an unmedicated, ADHD mad scientist.

What about Shen Yuan?

Thank you very much for asking.

Zidian flashed in purple lighting above the mortal's head. The torn mandible of a giant stripped spider-wasp clattered at his feet in a splatter of acid. The asphalt melted.

Shen Yuan lost it. "What da FUCK are you doing, imbecile?! I said *right* appendage, not its fucking left! Did your mother never teach you the difference between right and left, dipshit?!"

A snarl echoed in the skies. “My mother’s dead fucker!”

“I know and I’m not sorry!”

Jiang Cheng devolved in a string of curses. “Fuck! Why didn’t you tell me it spits fucking acid!”

Shen Yuan rolled his eyes above his paper fan. His motions idle, the mortal shot, “If you’d struck right like I told you too, you wouldn’t have needed to know that. Instead—“

“Argh! Fuck you!”

It was undetermined whether the fucker meant Shen Yuan or the giant stripped spider-wasp spraying acid over his purple form from its torn left mandible. What a shame, when the right held the beast’s heart. What could have been an easy, one punch kill had just turned into a game of endless dodging—a stupid fight of endurance.

Shen Yuan had no patience for that.

Just in case, before strolling away, Shen Yuan flipped off the struggling cultivator. “You’re the fucker here. You go fuck yourself. Dumbass.”

He walked away. Shen Yuan need not go far before his expertise was once again in high demand. He paused and pinched the bridge of his nose. Eyes tightly shut, Shen Yuan shook his head. “Didi, you can wield all the swords in the world, if the Ghost-Head Spider looks you in the eye you’ll still be trapped in your worst nightmare for all eternity.”

“Really?” Xie Lian chuckled nervously as he summoned dozens more swords out of thin air to shield his figure from the demonic spiders crawling over the Haunted Mansion ride. “Well, this one happens to be familiar with the concept of being trapped with all kinds of s-spiders, hahaha…”

Shen Yuan scowled at the sight of the tiny ghost fire burning brighter at that. “Yeah, well I guarantee you don’t want to go there anyway. Its worst than spending a full century buried.”

“Would these little… things try to eat my living body while I’m stuck in nightmares?”

“Obviously.”

The god giggled—a manic edge to his too wide eyes. “Then it’s actually better! I’d rather not be aware of their little mandibules tearing off my skin, hahaha!”

”Wait, what?!” Shen Yuan gagged. “That’s fucking disgusting! Don’t just drop such horrors so fucking casually—and Jun Wu, don’t you fucking laugh! It’s all your fault—“

“AIIIEEEEEE!”

Xie Lian shouted as a spider jumped his way. Eyes snapped shut, the graceful immortal trashed like a terrified animal until his fingers found Jun Wu’s robes. The god wielded his nemesis against the rush of spiders like a shield.

Shen Yuan nodded. “That’s it, didi, show that fucker his place. Keep up the good work.”

With a thumbs up, Shen Yuan departed. Clearly, their youngest (?) didi got it handled.

This expert stopped once more a few paces away. In a cajoling tone, Shen Yuan asked, “Do you need anything, my good child?”

Lan Wangji cradled his spiritual qin in the nook of his arm. Long and dainty fingers strummed the cords in pristine melodies. He side-eyed the mortal fanning himself idly by his side.

Lan Wangji spoke in a deep and flat tone, “This world feels doomed. Is it these ‘phones’?”

Taken aback, Shen Yuan blinked several times.

What the heck, Lan Wangji?! Are you truly willing to debate technology and its potentially nefarious impacts on the young developing mind and the environment with this blasé millenial?!

Well, truth be told, in Shen Yuan’s humble opinion, it wasn’t much of a debate. “Yeah?”

Lan Wanji’s hard amber eyes seemed to try and read Shen Yuan’s very soul. Without a word, the peerless immortal in white mourning robes fished the phone Shen Yuan gifted him the day before.

It shattered on the ground.

That was the most eloquent ‘no, thank you’ Shen Yuan was ever told.

He felt like the proudest father. “What about the precious pictures of your husband?”

Lan Wangji turned back to his qin, and the torrents of demonic beasts he faced, serenity etched in the transcendant dance of his fingers.

“Wei Ying is here.”

See?

What a good, reasonable child.

Unfortunately, Wei Wuxian was too busy blowing in his goddamn flute to chat.

Shen Yuan thus circled back to the angry grape.

“How’s it going, dipshit?”

Acid dripped from the sky like rain. Shen Yuan took shelter under an overturned nacelle at the edge of the Ferris wheel’s wreckage.

Jiang Cheng zipped among the clouds in a purple flurry. “Could be doing better, fucker!”

All of them could.

The Endless Abyss bore its name well. The tides of monsters it spat out were endless. For each beast they killed, three more popped out. Foes only kept growing in numbers; their own strength and focus only dwindled.

They were caught in a deadlock.

Fuck.

They needed back-up, but who—

Sluuuurp!

Shen Yuan froze as the gurgling sound of a slurpee drained dry resounded in his back.

“You know, this Lord wonders.”

Shen Yuan turned around with all the smoothness of a heap of rusted gears.

Tianlang-Jun pointed his slurpee at the pair of Heavenly Demons tearing themselves apart.

“I got twins?”

Chapter 13: “‘See Ya’ He Said,” Shen Yuan Lamented, Splayed Across a Therapy Chair

Chapter Notes

Finally, the last chapter.

Hope you had as much fun reading this story as I had writing it.

See ya!

Shen Yuan was lost to the vastness of the universe.

Tianlang-Jun was here. Alive. Whole.

It made so much sense.

Jun Wu was Xie Lian’s nemesis.

Jiang Cheng was Wei Wuxian’s natural enemy, because—brothers, duh.

And Tianlang-Jun was, technically, the villain in *this* Shen Qingqiu’s story.

Not Bing-ge.

Which meant a couple of things : first, Jun Wu was a confused old man; second, they had a wild scum villain on the run.

Good for him.

Shen Yuan had enough on his plate as it was. He had no time to worry about another fucking Shen Qingqiu. Still, this hater couldn’t help pondering a most important question : with, or without limbs?!

An able-bodied Shen Qingqiu was far more concerning. Still, with good prosthetics—

“Master Shen?”

Shen Yuan reconnected with reality at the violent sight of a handsome young man in a pink t-shirt far too small for his hulking frame.

This poor mortal shielded his eyes. However, it was too later : Shen Yuan had already seen enough to be traumatized for the rest of his life. There, right before this master, the Heavenly Demon overlord stood in all his splendour : belly button out, a familiar shirt desperately

trying and failing to cover his lower belly. Why was that shirt so familiar? Didn't Shen Yuan use to own the same? Or was it his sister? Whatever. That perfect belly button, not unlike his husband's—

Shen Yuan throttled that line of thought.

Anyways. The shameless pink shirt did not matter as much as those lush curls put up in a complicated hairdo, those sharp talon-like nails dutifully painted, and the bags overflowing in useless baubles hanging off the demon's arms.

In a daze, all Shen Yuan could splutter was, "C-pop?!"

Tianlang-Jun nodded with enthusiasm. "The most enthralling notes in all the realms. This Lord reckons Master Shen is a cultured man no matter which world he finds himself in. Now"—Tianlang-Jun carefully handed his countless bags to a stunned Shen Yuan—"be careful, these are collectibles."

Without further ado, the demon overlord turned to his sons quarrelling across the skies. It was with a defeaning roar that Tianlang-Jun jumped after them.

"YOU GODDAMN BRATS!" He collided with the twin Luo Binghes. Shen Yuan swore he heard the sparkling beads woven in the man's hair tinkle despite the distance. "Enough! Can't this Lord even once in his life savour the joys and treasures of the human realm in peace?!"

However, before Tianlang-Jun could properly chastise either of his brawling children, the skies ripped apart.

Shen Yuan despaired.

What else, now?!

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A bolt of crackling lighting bled out the wounded Heavens like a pour of acid.

Its light blinded the gods themselves. In a scream drowned by a thunderous boom akin to a giant's derisive clap of hands, lighting struck Bing-ge like a heavenly tribulation.

When the light died, he was no more.

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Moments later, their entire troupe gaped at the once again peaceful skies like chicks waiting to be fed. Under their rounded eyes, a scrap of parchement burnt at the edges quietly fluttered down the Heavens. The piece of rice paper landed at their feet.

In pristine calligraphy, it read :

'*He's fine.'*

Nothing more.

And yet, there seemed to be an unspoken ‘unless’ in those few, cryptic words.

Eventually, someone spoke.

“What the hell just happened?” Jiang Cheng sounded gutted. “Who the fuck was that?!”

Xie Lian gathered his jaw from the ground. The man looked like he didn’t know wether to laugh or cry as he mumbled, “Well, the Thunder Master would definitely wield this kind of power, but the position has been vacant for as long as this one remembers…”

No one had a better guess.

Shen Yuan gazed down to the piece of paper sitting in his hands. At a glance, he knew.

He knew this distinguished and elegant calligraphy like the back of his hand.

It filled the countless scrolls gathering dust on the shelves of the bamboo hut this faker appropriated for himself, and never touched.

This imposter crumbled the piece of parchment.

He said nothing.

.

With no Heavenly Demon on site willing to maintain it, the Endless Abyss sealed itself.

The remaining demonic beasts were dealt with. By nightfall, peace befell the modern world again.

Their troupe gathered around sad buckets of celebratory popcorn, Xie Lian raised his hand. “How do we leave?”

Everyone naturally turned to Jun Wu. The culprit cocked a brow. “I never planned on going back.”

Everyone turned hopeful eyes to Shen Yuan.

Their self-proclaimed leader snapped his fan open, and hid behind. Faced with a trick question, this master did what he did best whenever he found himself out of sensical options : he himself turned to the protagonist and desperately clutched his golden thigh.

His face a mask of knowledge, Shen Yuan bullshited solemnly, “This master obviously knows how to return safely to our respective realms. Binghe?”

Go, young hero, work your magic.

Under Shen Yuan’s cutting emerald gaze, this bright disciple of his straightened his spine. “Shizun is wise. However, Shizun forgets Xin Mo—“

“Ah!”

Wei Wuxian snapped his fingers.

Under their wide, bedraggled eyes, the demonic cultivator produced the black sword—now no more than a slab of cold iron; which happened to be super underwhelming until, his face crinkled, the bastard poured his cultivation inside.

Resentment instantly shrouded Xin Mo in a black, fuming, murderous aura—even more powerful than when Luo Binghe wielded it.

Shen Yuan gaped as the sickly thin man raised his arm, slashed the blade through thin air, and reality tore apart—just like that.

On the other side of the inter-dimensional portal, twelve wizened peaks greeted them.

Shen Yuan dropped his fan.

Everyone froze.

Even the flickering ghost fire nesting in Xie Lian’s hair stilled into a cold, spiky thing as Wei Wuxian turned back to their troupe, grinning. “Nice view. Must be a hassle to climb all those stairs though—”

“*YOU COULD DO THIS ALL ALONG?!*”

Over half a dozen incensed voices merged into one massive shout; it washed over the demonic cultivator like a tsunami. The cold clutches of his husband dug in Wei Wuxian’s shoulders. Somehow, Lan Wangji’s silence seemed to speak louder yet.

Shrivelling beneath his husband hard and judgemental amber eyes, Wei Wuxian twirled the fuming demonic sword in his grasp nervously. “Yeah? I mean, I did link this Xin Mo to my soul—”

“*THEN WHY DIDN’T YOU SAY SO?!*”

The bastard paused. He folded his arms. Wei Wuxian opened and closed his mouth several times, thinking up his argument, only to settle on : “Wouldn’t it have been boring?”

Lan Wangji closed his eyes, as if in pain.

The sentiment was contagious.

“Mn.”

“Besides, we had a whole realm to save!”

“Mn.”

“Would you even believe me if I said I just realized how to do this shit now?!”

“Wei Ying.”

Wei Wuxian threw his hands in the air. “Alright, fine! You win! I forgot! I forgot about Xin Mo!”

Lan Wangji opened his eyes.

As Wei Wuxian grumbled more inane excuses, Tianlang-Jun gathered his precious belongings. “This Lord has no intention to go back. If anyone must absolutely look for this Lord, his next cultural stop is Disney.”

Just like that, the demon overlord left for better prospects.

Shen Yuan shrugged. He was far past the point where he gave a singular fuck.

Wei Wuxian waved after the demon’s retreating back. “Alright, see ya!”

Tianlang-Jun gone, it was Jun Wu’s turn to wave his hands dismissively. “This master fears he must stay behind too. What if Nianqing shall arrive while this one already left? I can’t leave Nianqing to fend for himself in this strange world in good conscience.“

Xie Lian squinted his eyes, skeptical. The ghost fire nestled in his hair looked—somehow—murderous. “Why should this one allow you to? What would you do? Terrorize this realm?”

Jun Wu folded his arms. “Can’t this master try and overturn a single regime? Certainly there must be at least one land in this world in need of a better leader.”

At this, Shen Yuan snapped his fingers.

“Great thinking! Here.” The mortal gifted Jun Wu his phone. He pointed various things : “Money app, social media, and rent are all here. You’re all set.” Pumping his fist, Shen Yuan grabbed his husband with the other. “Go! Jun Wu for president!”

With these as his parting words, the mortal couldn’t walk across the portal fast enough; this master was more than ready to go back to the tranquility of his home, far away from all those fucking weirdos.

“See ya!”

Shen Yuan waved his hand dismissively.

Then, he froze.

See ya? What the fuck do you mean, ‘*see ya*’?!

Midway through the inter-dimensional portal, Shen Yuan whirled around. A bright, wide smile met his eyes—blurred into a manic grin.

Shen Qingqiu ripped the glasses off his face.

“Fuck me,” he wheezed out.

The cultivator’s pallor turned ghostly; the man could barely stand on his legs as Luo Binghe pulled him out the portal.

It was too late. Under Shen Qingqiu’s helpless eyes, the demonic cultivator exploded in a most evil cackle. He waved his arm, literally flaunting Xin Mo in this master’s harried face, and, by his command, the portal sealed itself shut a breath away from Shen Qingqiu’s nose.

The immortal master stumbled backward. The aloof and elegant scholar landed on his butt most gracelessly. Clutching his chest, Shen Qingqiu wheezed out again, “Fuck me!”

Fuck, fuck, fuck!

Did he really just leave Xin Mo, a demonic sword with *dimension crossing abilities* to that unmedicated ADHD genius mad scientist?!

F.U.C.K.

A string of ominous ‘see ya’ circled the entirety of his thoughts. Pale as a sheet, with no strength left in his limbs to support his weight, Shen Qingqiu sagged against his husband powerful chest. Before he knew it, Shen Qingqiu choked on blood. The cultivator feared he might be suffering from a fatal qi deviation, but he quickly took notice of the palm pressed against his bloodless lips.

Luo Binghe growled. “This Lord knew the little guy in white was dangerous! Shizun needs more blood mites! Drink it all!” The Heavenly Demon pressed his palm tighter against his lips. As Shen Qingqiu flailed in his husband’s grasp, Luo Binghe’s eyes flashed red. He ordered, “From now on, Shizun is only allowed to eat this disciple’s cooking—no matter what!”

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Xianle walked trough the portal—a miserable little shrine on the other side—not long afterward. He barely spared Jun Wu one last warning glance. Instead, the new Heavenly Emperor preferred to scoop the pathetic form of the ghost fire lingering in his hair. He cradled its whimsy flames in the well of his palms like it were a priceless treasure.

Jun Wu should have crushed it, all those years ago.

A blink later, both their souls crossed the barrier between the realms; the couple once again walked hand in hand, long black hair swishing over their backs. They gazed tenderly at each other—held each other’s entire world in that singular look.

The rest of them could be damned.

“See ya!”

The portal collapsed on itself.

Jun Wu ripped his gaze away.

It re-opened a moment later, this time featuring a quiet mountain laced in dew and mist as if the peak sat among the clouds themselves.

Jiang Cheng crossed his arms. Scowling, the cultivator in purple had first seemed to await the cries of pain and death of the unfortunate souls who first dared cross the threshold of his brother's latest creation. However, as none reached their ears, the man now looked utterly despondent as he walked straight in without a word of goodbye.

Surprisingly, the one Jun Wu suspected might be a block of jade gone sentient opened his mouth. In a deep and melodious voice, Lan Wangji asked, "Why bring us too?"

Ah.

Why, indeed.

Jun Wu would like to know too.

The god sighed, long suffering. "Put simply, talismans aren't this master's specialty," he admitted.

Wei Wuxian perked up. "If you want I can—"

"No!"

Lan Wangji grasped his husband by the collar. In quick, cutting steps, the mortal cultivator rushed through the crackling portal without another thought, his crazy husband in tow.

"Ha ha ha! See ya!"

With this last—rather ominous—'see ya' Jun Wu found himself by his lonesome again.

Despite the roars and the disquieted wails of the countless beasts of steel surrounding the premises, the silence gathered around the man's lonely figure felt deafening.

Luckily for this world, it didn't last.

The portal had just sealed itself close behind the two morons that a comforting warmth filled the god's chest. With long, dainty fingers, Jun Wu pulled out the pendant lying against his chest. It glowed red, pleasantly warm against his palm, pulsing—forebodingly so.

Looking up at the stars, Jun Wu sighed.

"Finally," he whispered to them.

With newfound purpose, Jun Wu tucked the pendant back against his heart. He set himself in motion. The god knew exactly where to go : all he had to do was follow his heart. The warmer it got, the closer he'd be to his goal.

For Mei Nianqing had finally succumbed to the tentation, and pressed that big red button.

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